Discussion Questions

September 3, 1939: FDR gives a fireside chat
1) Why was it so important for FDR to emphasize to the American people that the United States would remain out of the war for as long as possible?
2) Why did Britain, led by Winston Churchill, join the war while America did not?
3) What other “fireside chats” did FDR give during his time as president? What topics did he address?

BONUS! Listen to FDR’s fireside chat on September 3, 1939, entitled “On the European War,” and read the transcript here: https://millercenter.org/president/speeches/detail/3315

September 2, 1940: Destroyers for Bases Agreement
1) Why was this agreement necessary?
2) The 1940 presidential election was approaching when FDR signed this agreement. Do you think this had any effect on his decision to go through with it? Why or why not?

November 5, 1940: FDR elected president
1) How long did FDR serve as president? How long did Winston Churchill serve as prime minister?
2) What is the maximum number of terms a US president can serve today? When was this limit set and why?
3) In the US, the president is elected to office by the people. What is the process of electing a prime minister in Britain?

March 11, 1941: Lend-Lease Bill
1) What were the terms and conditions of this bill? What was so controversial about it? Did the majority of Americans support this bill?
2) The signing of the Lend-Lease Bill and the issuing of the Atlantic Charter by Churchill and FDR occurred within months of each other. Do you think these were signs that the US would soon be joining the war?

February 19, 1942: Executive Order 9066
1) Americans of what other ancestries were affected by this order?
2) Do you think this was fair of the American government to do?
3) What led to the distrust of Japanese Americans? Was this distrust justified?

June 20, 1943: Detroit Race Riots
1) The population in Detroit grew very quickly once World War II began. Why were so many people, both blacks and whites, eager to move there?
2) What do you think Churchill meant when he said “We three must remain friends in order to ensure happy homes in all countries”? Do you agree?

June 22, 1944: G.I. Bill
1) What did FDR hope to achieve from signing the G.I. Bill?
2) Throughout the war FDR was concerned with the adjustment of American soldiers back to civilian life, but he signed the G.I. Bill when the war was nearly finished—after he, Churchill, and Stalin had planned and executed Operation Neptune. Do you think the timing was a coincidence?

June 26 and October 24, 1945: United Nations Charter
1) Why did the League of Nations fail? Why did America refuse to join?
2) What does the term “ratification” mean?
3) What are some of the main objectives of the United Nations?
4) How many members are there in the United Nations today?
1939

September 3
FDR speaks to the people of the United States about Germany’s invasion of Poland. In his speech, the president pledges that America will remain neutral for as long as possible: “As long as it remains within my power to prevent, there will be no blackout of peace in the United States.”

1940

September 2
FDR signs the Destroyers for Bases Agreement, in which America gives Britain fifty US destroyers in exchange for land under Britain’s rule to be used as naval and air bases.

1941

March 11
FDR signs the Lend-Lease Bill, allowing America to give aid to Britain and eventually China and the Soviet Union.

1942

February 19
Executive Order 9066 is issued, which allows the US military to designate military areas as places where certain people may be excluded or banned. As a result, thousands of Japanese Americans living on the West Coast are relocated to internment camps.

1943

November 5
FDR is elected to a third term as president.

1944

December 7
Japanese Air Forces attack Pearl Harbor in Hawaii.

November
At the Tehran Conference in Iran, Churchill emphasizes to FDR and Joseph Stalin of Russia the importance of their alliance to the outcome of the war and to the journey towards peace: “We three must remain friends in order to ensure happy homes in all countries.”

1945

June 22
An armistice is signed between France and Germany. This leaves the United Kingdom alone in the fight against Hitler and Nazi Germany. The US is still reluctant to join the war, despite Britain’s pleas.

June 6
Allied powers launch D-Day, or Operation Neptune, an invasion against Germany’s forces on the beaches of Normandy, France. The success of the attack is considered a major turning point in the war. It leads to the liberation of concentration camps and cities across Europe.

September 2
Japan signs surrender terms aboard the battleship Missouri, signaling the end of the international conflict.

December 11
Germany and Italy declare war on the US.

October 24
The UN is formally established with the ratification of the United Nations Charter.